

Abraham Lincoln papers

From James R. Partridge to David Davis, November 21, 1860

State Secretary's Office

Annapolis Nov. 21, 1860

Dear Sir:

In your relations with my friend Mr. Winter Davis¹ — and with others interested, perhaps, in knowing the facts of which I write, I must beg you to find a reason — or excuse, if you think that needed — for the liberty I take in sending you this letter.

1 Henry Winter Davis

We have heard of the proceedings of certain parties here in Baltimore, and elsewhere, to prevent and hinder what some of them fear — and others seem to think certain — viz that Davis becomes a member of Mr. Lincoln's administration.

Some of these proceedings consist of the representations, industriously circulated, — under guise of friendship for Mr. Davis — that they desire his promotion in another way; — and that he could better serve the cause of a National Administration, by being “again returned to the House of Representatives where an election to the Speakership is (certainly) his reward.”

This has such plausibility — and seems to be suggested so much by a desire to aid the cause, and also to acknowledge the services heretofore rendered by Mr. Davis, that it may easily be credited and readily acted on by those who really are his friends — away from here and who cannot know the facts. If these are not now, and at once, made known, this seeming friendly act may do some harm.

We, of course, do not know — and do not expect to know — whether it is intended that Mr. Davis shall enter the Cabinet of the next President, and we have just as little disposition, as right, to inquire prematurely into such matters. However much all his friends here, and those in Maryland anxious for the success of the new administration, might desire it, they think that perhaps the thing least likely to aid such a consummation would be any attempt to advise or interfere with those who alone have the responsibility of such matters; and they see no element of the success, for which they hope, in the prudent silence which must be observed in that regard. But I hope that, in the name of his friends, I may not be thought to interfere or advise improperly, when I take the liberty of saying to you that if it is, or should be, proposed or intended to make so just a recognition of Mr. Davis' talents

and services; and secure, for Mr. Lincoln's administration, the aid and power such a step would give, it ought not to be prevented, nor his name exchanged for any other, on the supposition that he could be returned to the next Congress — or then elected Speaker.

Mr. Davis' friends here know that he could not be returned from this District, even if he were willing to stand the poll. They will not present his name for reelection — not because they do not, heartily, approve his acts and speeches then: nor because they do not completely sustain his votes there, especially those, which, like that for the Speakership, gained him the respect even of opponents, secured the exposure of Democracy, and contributed to the late success. But it is because they will not, after such services, expose him to the certainty of defeat by certain people here because of these services. We are too well aware of the bitter hatred of the political “traders” and “commercial” politicians have against Mr Davis to give them the opportunity of showing it to his disadvantage We know too well that the same means which secured Mr. Pennington's defeat the other day in New Jersey, would in the same way reward Mr. Davis manliness and courage. There are too many here who profess to be open that would subscribe any amount and contribute any labor to secure Mr. Davis' defeat while by voting for a Democrat, while any other opponent of it than he might have their votes. It is precisely because Mr. Davis' ability and service, and maintainance of the truth and right, have secured for him the envy hatred malice and all uncharitableness of some of our own people that his friends will not allow him, nor would he allow himself, to be exposed to it.

This is the fact, of which, it seemed to me, you ought not to be misinformed — and which, if any occasion should arise for its being made known in other quarters, ought to be stated by some one competent to know & to tell. None know this fact, better than ourselves, though it is neither prudent nor necessary to admit publicly the power of these false friends. In case therefore the promotion of Mr Davis should be thought of or intended in this way I have supposed it seemed to me to be only an act of friendship and justice to him, to enable you to say that it ought not to be hindered by the other expectation. This last is impossible — and for the reasons I have mentioned; because Mr. Davis has had the courage and ability to do what he has done, regardless of such consequences to himself.

You of course would not hear this from Mr. Davis — for reasons which I know you appreciate, as I have a right to suppose you will appreciate my motive in sending you this letter. It is that you may know the truth, so that others, if the occasion requires, may act upon a knowledge of facts and without being misled.

Of course we desire Mr. Davis promotion. We desire also, and no less, the success of Mr. Lincoln's administration. We think this last would be aided by the other; but if the former is not to take place

now, and in that way, we hope it will be because some even greater service aid and assistance will be secured by our disappointment.

I hope I may be pardoned for thus calling your attention to a fact, which I thought you ought to know — and which you could only learn from some real friend of Mr Davis — and without his knowledge for you will readily suppose that if I was to show him or tell him of this letter he would not consent to my sending it.

I am Sir, with regard,

Your obedient Servant

James R Partridge

[Endorsed on Envelope by David Davis:]

Mr Partridge Secy of State of Maryland is a gentleman of character, — whose acquaintance I formed in — Baltimore, a few years ago—

I have thought the letter was well written & that you ought to see it—

Davis